

# Gamble's gamble paying off

## City man receives 'Person of the Year' award

By **STEPHANIE FARR**  
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Through his Community Alliance for Progressive Positive Action program, director Loni Gamble has fostered and showcased the talents of many young people throughout the community.

Yet it was Gamble himself who was in the spotlight Tuesday night, when he was presented with the Person of the Year award and his program was given an award of merit at the Pennsylvania Association of Housing and Redevelopment Agencies banquet in State College.

Gamble was nominated for the state-wide award by Beth Turner, director of the Lycoming County Housing Authority.

Since July 2004, CAPP's offices have been housed at the authority's Penn Vale location and the two organizations have worked hand-in-hand to foster creativity and leadership in area youth.

Turner said she nominated Gamble for the award because of the countless hours he puts into the program, which is funded mainly through grants and personal donations.

"He does a lot of pro-bono stuff here and has done a lot to make sure volunteers or administrative people receive a stipend for helping out when there's not even enough money for his own salary," she said. "He puts hundreds and hundreds of hours into the program without pay. People who put that amount of pride and ownership in their programs deserved to be recognized."

The CAPP program was designed out of a need to bring opportunities to children in the community who were unrecognized or felt out of the loop, Gamble said.

"I had come to the point where I said 'When are they going to do something about this?' and I had to realize I was speaking about myself," he said. "I had to make the changes I wanted to see. I needed to be proactive."

It was in 2002 that Gamble went into the community and talked to children who he saw were not participating in any activities, and therefore, at risk for negative influences.

"I asked the kids what they liked to do and a majority of the kids were male and wanted a basketball league," he said. "I took their names and started to design a program where we could connect with the kids by providing them what they wanted — which wasn't much."

What developed was the Kennedy-King Basketball League, and in its first year 60 participated. Today, the league goes by the CAPP name, and attracts more than 140 participants.

"We couldn't tell the kids at that time it was a youth intervention program — it was a basketball program — but the basketball was really just a smokescreen," Gamble said.

After Gamble had the kids hooked on the basketball league, he started to put things into perspective for them. He explained that the jerseys and equipment the teams used were coming from donations given by the community.

"Everybody's giving to us, so what are we giving back? I asked the kids," Gamble said. "Most kids don't understand how a community works and what civic responsibility is all about."

When things were put into perspective, Gamble said they were more willing to participate in empowerment workshops and community service.

"In the beginning a lot of kids would say 'I'm not on probation, I don't need to do service,' they associated it with a negative thing," he said. "But in the end, they realized that it felt good to give to other people."

Out of the basketball league grew Young Artists in Action, a program which today, targets more than 160 youths who are artistically oriented. Eventually, Gamble also developed a summer employment initiative and a mentoring program, among other activities under the CAPP umbrella.

"A lot of kids, without this, wouldn't have the chance to connect with one another," he said. "If there's going to be a promising future, we have to build relationships within our communities beyond the bricks and mortar."

For Gamble, the look on a child's face when they get it, when they get the idea of what a community is and what role they play within it, is a reward better than any tangible one.

"It makes me feel good. I live here and in my own little way I'm trying to help," he said. "It's a good feeling, knowing that you're not just talking about it anymore."

**CAPP director Loni Gamble honored by state association.**



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*Community activist Lonnie Gamble named Person of the Year by state organization*

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